



# Pensioners 'need \$50 a week' rise

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THE nation's Senior Australian of the Year Pat LaManna wants a \$50 weekly rise in the pension.

He argues pensioners are "struggling". His call comes as a major review into pension reform, by Families Department head Jeff Harmer, is expected to be handed to the Federal Government by the end of the week.

Mr LaManna, 76, who only last month was awarded his honour by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, said the nation's elderly deserved a rise after paying tax their entire lives.

"Pensioners have to survive on very little. It is unfair," Mr LaManna, OAM, said yesterday. "It should be increased. A lot of pensioners are struggling."

He said he believed the pen-

sion did not adequately keep up with the cost of living.

He called for a rise of at least \$50 a week.

At present, the pension stands at \$281.05 a week for singles and \$469.50 for couples.

The Harmer Review reportedly will recommend a \$35 increase in the single age pension, to bring it up to two-thirds of the couple rate.

Pensioners groups say even a \$35 rise would be inadequate.

Council On The Ageing chief executive Ian Yates is calling for an increase of \$100 a week in the base rate - \$50 a week, over two years.

That would take into account annual bonuses and last year's bonus payment, he said.

"\$35 is way too low, it will cause widespread disappointment and anger.

"We have had, for some years

now, increasing reports from charities of first-time pensioners showing up for hampers and assistance with bills," Mr Yates said. "This is a once in a couple of decades opportunity to change the pensions."

Any proposed rise in the pension rate is expected to receive bipartisan support.

That is despite Opposition families spokesman Tony Abbott expressing caution last week, saying the global financial crisis had weakened the case for a blanket rise in the pension.

Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull since has stated the Opposition believes the aged pension must be increased.

Mr Abbott and the Opposition's spokeswoman for ageing Margaret May did not return calls yesterday.

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